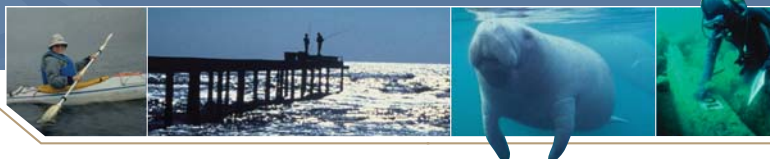


# West Coast Pilot

## A Regional Partnership to Advance Ecosystem Approaches to Marine Protected Areas



### Background

There is a growing awareness that the conservation and sustainable use of the nation's marine environment requires ecosystem-based approaches to management and regional coordination among resource managers. Marine protected areas (MPAs) are critical components of effective ecosystem-based management, especially when designed and managed with strong science and stakeholder input. To this end, the United States is developing a comprehensive and effective national system of MPAs focused on conserving our natural and cultural heritage and ensuring the sustainable production of commercially and recreationally vital species.

The west coast—California, Oregon, and Washington—is at the forefront of federal, state, and tribal MPA activity and has an increasing interest in place-based marine ecosystem management. For these reasons, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National MPA Center will lead a collaborative initiative there to pilot some of the key methods and approaches for designing and managing an effective regional system of MPAs on the west coast. Working closely with MPA programs, tribes, and stakeholder groups in the region, this effort will involve developing, testing, and applying analytical tools and using the best information, including science-based data and traditional ecological knowledge. The products of this multi-year endeavor, and the lessons it offers, will provide a foundation for regional MPA planning, as well as numerous other ecosystem-based management efforts that require the same comprehensive information.

### Project Goals and Focus

The west coast pilot's goals are to facilitate the effective use of MPAs as an ecosystem management tool to conserve and protect vital marine areas and resources on the west coast, and to inform the development of a regionally-based national system of MPAs.

Some of the outputs and products expected from the pilot include:

- A suite of tools, methods, and information for regional MPA planning and adaptive management that will provide the ability to identify:
  - a. human use patterns in a regional, ecosystem context
  - b. ecologically important areas
  - c. important submerged cultural resources
  - d. governance structure for west coast marine protected areas
- An ongoing regional forum for west coast state, federal, and tribal programs to efficiently coordinate their management of existing MPAs and collaboratively plan future conservation efforts.
- The ability to integrate data layers and identify regionally-based priority ecological and submerged cultural resource areas in need of new or enhanced protection and management.

### Project Components

Work on the pilot project will involve two inter-dependent components: a scientific assessment and analysis track, and an agency and stakeholder planning track.

**Science and Assessment.** The following key scientific assessment and analysis efforts will provide the natural and social science foundation for identifying significant gaps in current protection of important marine cultural and ecosystem resources, services and values:

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- *Resource Characterizations.* Synthesis of existing data on: (a) the distribution and connectivity of marine habitats, resources and ecosystem processes; and (b) the location, status and historical significance of submerged cultural resources along the Pacific coast.
- *Patterns and Impacts of Human Use.* Synthesis of existing and new data from stakeholders on how, when and where people use marine ecosystems, and assessment of the potential impacts of those uses on ecosystems, cultural resources and other users.
- *Contributions of Existing MPAs.* Synthesis of key information about the location, purpose, level of protection, and potential ecosystem impacts for all place-based areas on the west coast, including a compilation of *de facto* marine areas that restrict access for reasons other than conservation (e.g. security zones).

**Agency and Stakeholder Planning.** The agency and stakeholder planning component of the west coast pilot will use the scientific analyses developed to collaboratively identify priority national system conservation and management priorities for the west coast:

- *Federal, State, and Tribal Participation.* West coast federal, state, regional, and tribal agencies will be invited to collaboratively scope out and implement the pilot project. In 2006, a workshop of these MPA programs and other interested agencies will be convened to initiate this effort.
- *Governance Framework Overview.* Understanding which agencies have authority over different activities in a given geographic area is key for successful place-based planning and management. The MPA Center will develop a comprehensive overview of MPA policy at the international, federal, state, and tribal levels.
- *Stakeholder Input.* The MPA Center and partners will actively engage and seek advice from stakeholders throughout the west coast pilot. The MPA Center will communicate progress via regular updates in MPA.gov, newsletters, and other outlets.

## Partners

The west coast pilot is an ambitious undertaking and to succeed requires the collaboration of MPA programs and management authorities, with meaningful input from other stakeholders in the region. Led by the MPA Center, this effort involves a growing list of NOAA partners, including the National Marine Sanctuary Program, National Center for Coastal Ocean Science, National Estuarine Research Reserve System (a federal/state partnership), and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Other partners include federal programs, such as the Department of the Interior's National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; state and local agencies; the Pacific Fishery Management Council; federally-recognized tribes; academic and research institutions; and other interested partners. Providing a forum for integrating the multiple MPA efforts within the region at the state, federal, tribal, and local levels will not only enhance the effectiveness of existing MPAs, but result in more efficient, science-based approaches to their future use and the management of the marine environment.

## Timeframe

The collaboration of multiple partners in the region is essential to successfully completing each element of this effort. Scoping of the pilot with partners will begin in early 2006 and once initiated it is estimated to take several years to complete depending on the availability of information and resources.

## For Additional Information

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